

The Sacred Loft

By Ammar Khammash, The Jordan Times Weekender - October 2002

Driving from Madaba towards the east you gradually see a change in color of the soil. As the terrain gets more wrinkled, the soil starts losing its dark-red tint and gradually turns from shades of terracotta to pale ochre. This transition is basically signaling the crossing of the green-line that separates the wheatland of the Madaba plains from the more arid and rugged landscape of the semi-desert. The same shift, in color, topography and vegetation on land, is also reflected in the sky.

Here, the clouds get thinner and less wet, having dropped their rain-loads on the more fertile escarpment to the west.

The village of Um Al Rasas is small and simple. It has the pleasing atmosphere of a typical Jordanian village where the monuments simply exist without much fuss, celebration or the exploitation of a touristic attraction packaged as a commodity. This state of 'pure Jordan' is overwhelming and gives the visitor a feeling of discovery like in the 1950's, a feeling that is getting more rare by the day.

Um Al Rasas is a big site. It has a large walled city that started as a garrison in the Roman period under the name of *Kastron Mefaa*, and developed during the Byzantine period into an important city with houses and dozens of churches. Inside a metal shelter in one of these churches lies Jordan's most beautiful mosaic. There are also other structures, some of which were used as a monastery, and others as water reservoirs. Of all these attractions, the tower stands apart, a feature of pure delight.

Image not found

https://www.khamash.com/sites/default/files/images/research/um_rasas_01.jpg

